

# **The World Society Conceptions of Buddhist Transnational Actors in the Philippines: The Case of Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation**

## **Background and Significance of the Study**

The Westphalian mythic narrative of the origin of nation-states, created a dominant discourse where religion has been given minimal attention by scholars of International Relations. The idea that religion plays minimal to no part in any discussion on international relations has been the pervading assumption ever since religion was definitively detached from politics through the 1648 Peace of Westphalia and the secularization thesis. However, religion has become more and more visible in the global political arena of the twenty first century. As the world continues to globalize, religions persist to exert influence especially in global politics. According to Thomas (2010), the globalization of religion changes its nature and its role in international affairs (p. 97). While there is a tendency to associate religion in global politics with fundamentalism, violence and conflicts; religion, nevertheless, is key to comprehending international affairs, not only on war but also on issues such as peace and reconciliation, human rights and free market economics.

Some believe that modernization entails the end of religion's function in international politics as science and the free market induced progress would thrive and displace religion from its traditional societal importance. The secularization of the world has in effect undermined the legitimacy of religion in global politics. However, a number of scholars, like Segura (2011), claimed that religion never actually waned off in international affairs (pp. 75-76). Fox (2001) asserted that religion is a disregarded dimension of international relations. It has always been and remains to be a huge influence in international relations (Fox, 2009, p. 53). A variety of trends

such as the global transformation of religion indicates that religion is also a catalyst in shaping the international political landscape. Perhaps it could be said that the referred-to 'resurgence' of religion in international relations today is a product of its own evolution and that the rise of transnational religious actors is a new mechanism to control states and spread its influence throughout the world, resembling its seventh century involvement. The participation of religion in international relations does not conform to the Western-centric assumptions of a secular world order of nation-states, as well as the increasing centralized role of nation-state governments as social welfare providers.

With the emergence of religious transnational actors, specifically Buddhist transnational actors, its irrefutable influence in the contemporary international system suggests that religion and its place in international affairs should no longer be disregarded. Like Christianity and Islam, Buddhism can be considered a major globalization force. The increasing number of Buddhist transnational organizations such as the Soka Gakkai International and the Tzu Chi Foundation, which have been progressively making a name in international affairs through humanitarian efforts, are a manifestation of a non-secular world society amidst the secularized international system.

Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is an international Nichiren Buddhist organization instituted in 1975 by Daisuke Ikeda as an international peace movement, fashioned from its 1930s struggle against the Japanese militarist government. It concentrates on peace and disarmament, human rights, sustainable development, interfaith dialogue, humanitarian education, and cultural development. SGI conducts humanitarian aid projects to sustain places hit by disasters, and organizes campaigns like The People's Decade, which promotes the obliteration

of nuclear weapons. Its presence in 192 countries arguably makes it the world's largest socially engaged lay Buddhist association (Soka Gakkai International, 2015d).

On the other hand, Tzu Chi Foundation, which literally means Compassionate Relief, is an international, humanitarian, and non-governmental Buddhist organization established by Venerable Dharma Master Cheng Yen on the poor east coast in Hualien, Taiwan in 1966. The said organization has been helping out underprivileged communities and victims of calamities by providing medical care, education, humanistic culture, environmental protection, and social services. Tzu Chi Foundation has been operating with its many sub-organizations, such as the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) and the Tzu Chi Collegiate Youth Association, with its mission focused on “giving material aid to the needy and inspiring love and humanity to both givers and receivers,” and under its principles of “expressing great kindness to all sentient beings, and taking their suffering as our own,” and “being committed to Buddhism and to all living beings” (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2014a). With its 502 offices worldwide, Tzu Chi Foundation is undeniably creating a reputation in the international community (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2014a).

The aforementioned transnational religious organizations were chosen as cases of this study as these organizations are embodiment of Buddhism functioning in international affairs. Apart from that, Soka Gakkai International and the Tzu Chi Foundation are both recognized and registered by United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and are present in and have long history with the Philippines.

The researchers opted to delve into the role of Buddhism in contemporary international relations since there are only a few numbers of studies on religion and International Relations (IR) with Buddhism as its focus. Previous researches, generally, concentrate on two major world

religions, Islam and Christianity. It is also interesting to note Buddhism's involvement in international affairs, such as the Saffron Revolution in Myanmar, the 969 Movement by Ashin Wirathu Thero (also in Myanmar), and the Anti-Muslim protests of Bodu Bala Sena in Sri Lanka; despite its belief in quietism or the resistance of other's actions.

A study focused on Buddhism would expand the discussion on religion and international relations as Buddhist transnational organizations like Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation have networks that span across the globe, and advocacies that go into the public sphere such as nuclear disarmament. The study would, therefore, give attention to emerging non-state actors, and offer more information on how these new actors affect the contemporary international system. The results of the study would help provide answers that would guide the researchers in identifying the role of Buddhist transnational actors as they contribute to the development of world society.

This study is informed by the English School theory to be used as the lens in examining the role of Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation as cases of transnational religious actors in contemporary international relations. This school of thought considers three main concepts—the international system, international society, and world society. Of these three, the concept of world society has been the least explored. The utilization of the chosen concept in this study would contribute to the development of the English School's world society as a research approach, and hence, be valuable as a tool for the advancement of future studies on the dynamics between religion and International Relations.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The study sought to re-examine the role of religion in international relations by focusing on two Buddhist transnational actors and how they contribute to the creation of world society.

The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the history and institutional purpose of the Soka Gakkai International and the Tzu Chi Foundation?
2. How do Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation appropriate themselves into the contemporary international system?
3. How do Buddhist transnational actors such as the Soka Gakkai International and the Tzu Chi Foundation promote world society?

## **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This research expands the English School theory of International Relations, arguing that the functioning of Buddhist transnational actors in the contemporary international system indicates the existence of a World Society. Dating back from the late 1950s, the English School is characterized by two core elements: its concepts of international system, international society and world society; and its pluralist approach to theory (Buzan, 2004, p. 6). The distinctness of the English School lies in its eclecticism, with influences coming from different perspectives such as Hobbesian and Machiavellian realism, Grotian rationalism and Kantian revolutionism. While this eclecticism had garnered much criticism because of its perceived lack of coherence in the past, even to the point of some scholars who called for its 'closure', that very same characteristic, nevertheless, is now its strongest point in the period of globalization and change (Buranelli, 2015, p. 10).

For the purpose of the study, the researchers followed Barry Buzan's approach in the English School paradigm, specifically his notion of World Society (along with Richard Little). Buzan (2004) delineates the three key concepts as follows. First, the international system is aligned with realist and neorealist perspectives of state actors, power politics between these actors and the anarchic nature of the international system. Second, the international society, where most attention is given to by the English School scholars, refers to the establishment of shared identities, norms, rules and institutions among states which then becomes a source of order in an anarchical system. The English School scholars believe that despite having no overarching authority, states agree on and maintain rules, laws, and norms that would become a defining structure, creating a 'society' of states within an anarchical system. Lastly, the idea of a World Society according to Buzan, "takes individuals, non-state organizations and ultimately the global population as a whole as the focus of global societal identities and arrangements, and puts transcendence of the states-system at the center of IR theory" (p. 7). Navari (2015) points out that Buzan and Little take the three key concepts—international system, international society and world society—as 'different environments of action or social realities' and that these different environments coexist with one another (p. 20). This means that the existence of a World Society does not entail the replacement of the international society. Rather, these different environments manifest a dynamic relationship among each other; therefore, the further development of the international society is paralleled by the emergence and development of a corresponding World Society.

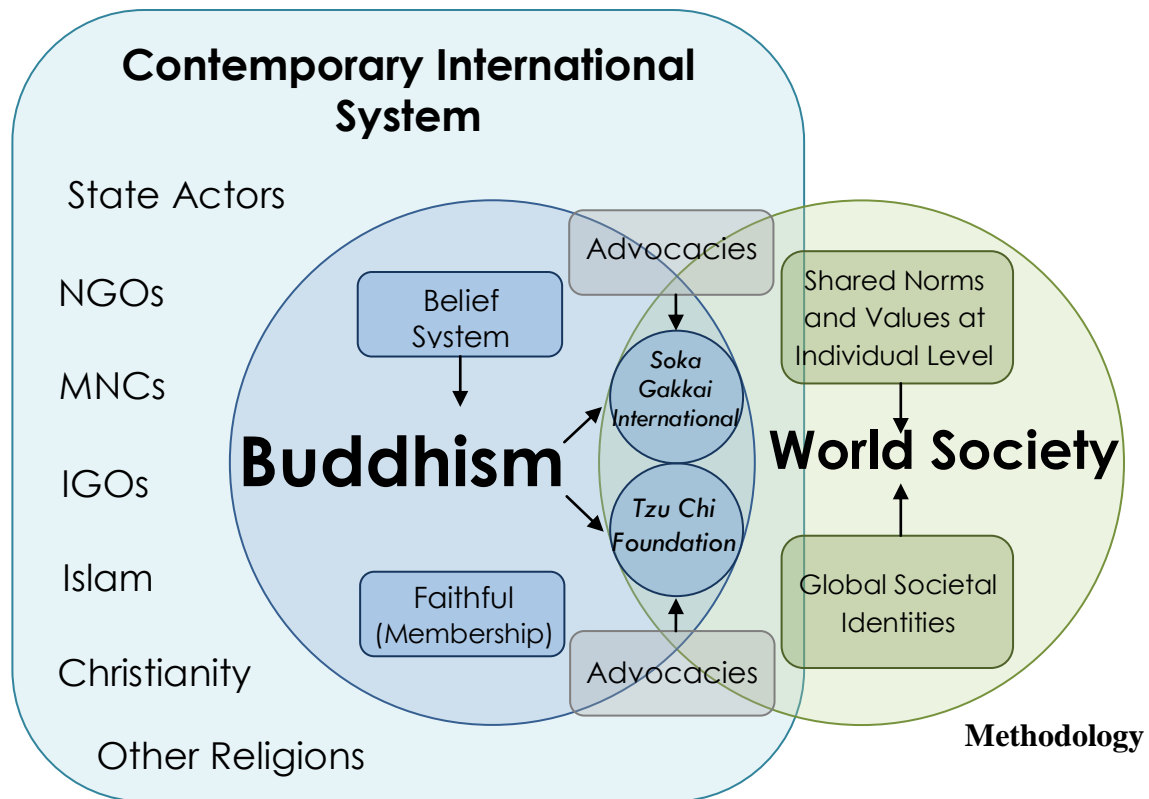
It is within the third concept that the study was situated in, exploring how Buddhist transnational actors promote World Society. According to Navari (2015), Buzan states that a World Society is made up of individuals, non-state organizations and the global population

altogether. It is characterized by the 'global identities of individuals' which means that the shared identities of individuals transcend the state, creating some form of cosmopolitanism (p. 19). Rather than the behavior of states, it is now more concerned in how these actors perceive their identities, something that which is no longer tied to that of the state. Jackson (as cited in Buzan, 2014, p. 14) adds that actors in this concept give priority to humanitarian responsibilities in contrast to international system and international society wherein priority is given to national and international responsibilities respectively.

Still among the three key concepts of English School theory, the World Society is the least explored (Buzan, 2014, p. 62). The international system concept which is based on realist understanding is clearly defined and well-developed. While the international society concept is at the forefront of the English School paradigm most scholars gave much attention to its development as a concept thereby making it greatly explored and well-established. Nevertheless, with the force of globalization threatening the territorialized and state-centric international order, the researchers believed that the concept of a world society can now be utilized as a social reality to situate the discussion of religion and religious transnational actors in international relations. Both the concept of world society and the emergence of religious transnational actors converge on the same point, that both exhibit a transcendence of the state-centric Westphalian order.

The conceptual framework in Fig. 1 is a visual representation of how religion would be explored in international relations through the English School theory's concept of a world society. It is a representation of the contemporary international system comprised of different actors, such as states, non-state entities like multinational corporations, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations as well as transnational religious actors. But the main focus of the study is Buddhist transnational actors, specifically the Soka Gakkai

International and the Tzu Chi Foundation. The study would present how Buddhist transnational actors promote world society and challenge the state-centric Westphalian order by identifying the belief system, advocacies and characteristics of these two case studies and further compare it to the elements of world society.



*Figure 1. Conceptual Framework*

## Methodology

By focusing on two Buddhist transnational organizations—Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and Tzu Chi Foundation—this study re-evaluates the role of religion in international relations through a mixed method approach, utilizing document analysis, participant observation and an in-depth interview.



The study followed a qualitative research design that utilizes case study analysis approach in order to uncover the role of Buddhist transnational actors in international relations specifically the Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation. This method allowed the researchers to develop an in-depth analysis on Buddhist transnational actors, describing and gathering themes and assertions especially in their promotion of an alternative international order—the world society.

The research subjects of the study are Buddhist transnational actors specifically the leaders, and one to two members of Soka Gakkai International and of Tzu Chi Foundation.

Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a lay Buddhist organization upholding the tradition that originated from Gautama Siddharta Shakyamuni and particularly the Buddhist traditions of the Mahayana scriptures and Lotus Sutra. According to the organization, it is dedicated to individual empowerment in the cause of peace (Soka Gakkai International, 2015a). It began as a small group of reform-minded educators in Tokyo, Japan. Today, it is the largest among Japan's new religious movements and has attracted over two million followers abroad. It has members in 192 countries and territories around the world. This organization has certain advocacies that go beyond the private sphere, ranging from nuclear disarmament to sustainable development and education (Soka Gakkai International, 2015d).

On the other hand, Tzu Chi Foundation is the world's largest Buddhist charity with international volunteers that are recognized by the United Nations Economic and Social Council. According to the organization, they encourage Buddhists to actively engage in improving society rather than just seeking personal, religious enlightenment. They follow Master Cheng Yen's dedication to help the suffering individuals and to bring harmony to society by contributing to

better social and community services, medical care, education and humanism (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2014a).

Aside from their advocacies and activities, and the fact that Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation are transnational in nature with quite a lot of members, the researchers decided on these organizations since both has long history with and are present in the Philippines. Their long-standing existence in the country guarantees an established and firm justification on answers sought in this study. Concurrently, Soka Gakkai International's presence in Davao City made interviews possible for the researchers attributable to its accessibility.

For data collection, this study utilized a mixed method approach, document analysis of both organizations' publications, participant observation for SGI's activities and an in-depth interview with several SGI members. By obtaining data from different types of data collection methods, the researchers were able to provide "a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility" (Eisner, 1991, as cited in Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Triangulation of data also enabled the researchers to corroborate data sets which led to more substantial findings.

A document analysis was carried out to examine the two organizations, looking into publications, essays, FAQs, charters, institutional principles, and other available resources from their official documents and official websites. These different resources became a rich source of data for the study. Merriam (1988) stated: "Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem" (as cited in Bowen, 2008, p. 29). The examination of a variety of literature helped produce a more in-depth analysis of SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation.

For the study, the researchers also used participant observation method by attending some of the activities organized by Soka Gakkai International such as the young men's division's

Sunday meeting on July 17, 2016, and a peace symposium on August 21, 2016. The researchers were able to observe how people in the organization interrelate, how they organize their meetings and how the members of the organization treat non-members during the said events. The method is significant in the study because it allowed the researchers to develop a “better understanding of the context and phenomenon under study” (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002, as cited in Kawulich, 2005).

Lastly, the researchers used in-depth interview method and conducted face-to-face interviews with members of the Soka Gakkai International. This provided the researchers the opportunity to interact with the SGI members and gain first-hand information on their motivations, feelings, attitudes, and point of views thus enriching the researchers' understanding on the topic at hand. This method was beneficial to the study as it offered more detailed information regarding SGI thus generated “a more complete picture” (Boyce & Neale, 2006, p. 3).

The study used Braun and Clarke’s (as cited in Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 402) thematic analysis approach in order to explore the phenomenon of Buddhist transnational actors and derive descriptions, themes and assertions from similarities, differences and patterns between and within the two case studies. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data gathered from the interview and from secondary sources by transcribing, reading and recording initial ideas. Subsequently, relevant and intriguing features of the data were codified, selected and collated that were relevant to these initial codes. Afterwards, these codes were integrated and gathered into potential themes. A thematic map was then generated as a way of reviewing the potential themes. These were checked whether these themes work with the entire gathered data. This phase was followed by defining and further refining of themes, and analyzing the

specificities and generalization of the whole idea of the study. This led to the construction of a clear definition and explanation for the themes. Finally, a final analysis was made that relates back to the research questions and literature of the study

## **Summary of Findings**

The dissection of data gathered arrives at a consensus that 1) there is a parallelism between the conducts of Buddhist transnational actors and that of state actors; 2) these Buddhist transnational actors perceive a chaotic world, thus, they believe that their mission is to provide universal remedy, and; 3) religious transnational organizations such as SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation function as non-governmental organizations, propagating a shared identity that goes beyond the state level.

### **1) The History and Institutional Purpose of Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation**

History is an integral part of the English School tradition, as Buzan states “...its focus has always been on history and theory for the global level of international relations” (2014, p. 5). The examination of the historical development of Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and Tzu Chi Foundation uncovers several distinctive features of the two cases. First, these two organizations were founded upon secular concerns and not necessarily on the dictates of their religious beliefs. Second, the developments of these organizations were dependent upon the leadership of key figures. Lastly, SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation were faced with several challenges and criticisms that question their roles as faith-based organizations. In addition to their historical development,

a look into their respective institutional purposes reveal similarities in their underlying principles: the differing advocacies on the same principle of respecting human life and dignity, the attitudes towards environmentalism and the promotion of humanistic ideals of Buddhism.

The discussion on the historical developments of Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation presents a narrative that starts from their inception wherein the birth of their mission was founded on secular concerns. SGI started as an organization for educational reformers while Tzu Chi Foundation's history rests upon the story and experiences of Master Cheng Yen. Following their inception came the specific turning point in their history where their respective missions were solidified into the missions they carry out today. For Josei Toda, it was his time in prison that led to his moment of enlightenment. After his release, he then set out to rebuild the organization into one that propagated the Nichiren Buddhist ideals and philosophy. For Cheng Yen, it was her experience of witnessing other people's suffering added to the people's criticisms of her own faith that made her realize her life's purpose which would lead her to the establishment of the Tzu Chi Foundation. From their humble beginnings to transformation into a global movement, their success would not be without criticisms and challenges. For Soka Gakkai International, their political involvement garnered criticism and attacks while the differences in doctrinal interpretation with Nichiren Shoshu ultimately led to the excommunication of Soka Gakkai from Nichiren Shoshu. Tzu Chi Foundation received backlash from the public with regard to a controversial development project as well as suspicious handling of funds and investments on companies. These were contradictory to the organization's principles. Nevertheless, these two organizations continue to expand and propagate their missions to the world.

Figure 2.1 is a timeline of Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation's historical development. This presents the important events that shaped the two organizations.

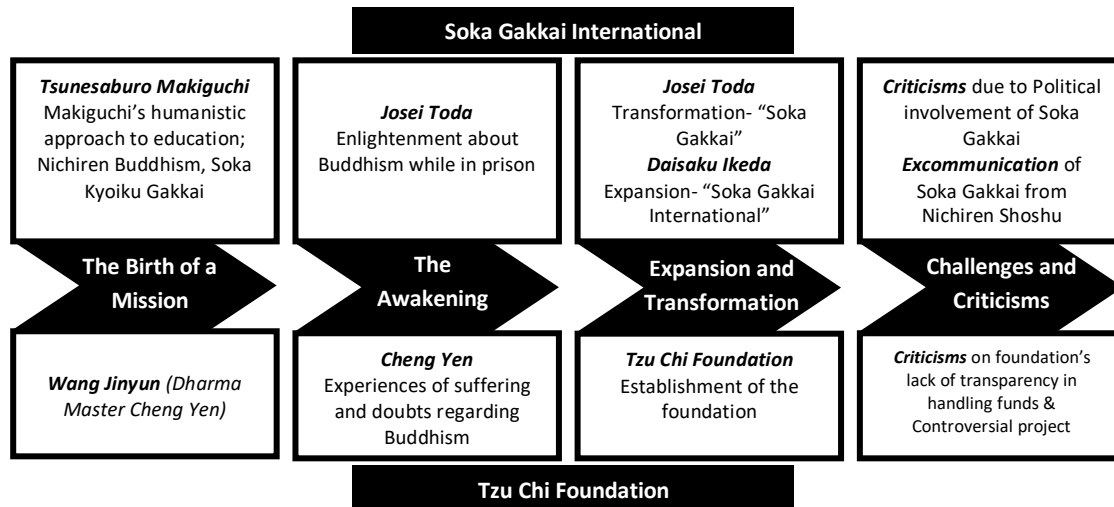
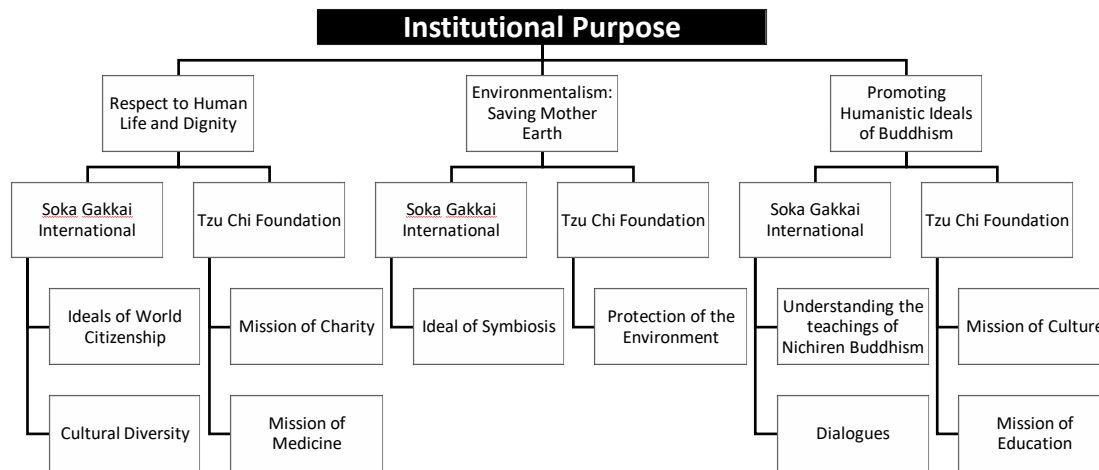


Figure 2.1 Historical Developments of SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation

Every organization has an influential motivation which drives its mission and defines its very existence. In the case of Soka Gakkai International, the rationale behind the launch of the organization centers on the propagation of peace, nourishing culture and cultivating education; all of which were based on the ideals of Nichiren Buddhism. These objectives are embedded within the SGI Charter that was adopted by its board of directors on October 16, 1995 (Soka Gakkai International, 1995). Tzu Chi Foundation, conversely, aims at the alleviation of the suffering of people towards the construction of a better world. The so-called Tzu Chi Eight Footprints of the organization encompass its eight-fold mission on charity, medicine, education, humanity—initially—bone marrow donation, environmental protection, community volunteerism and international relief (Tzu Chi Foundation, 2009d).

Their institutional purpose can be categorized into three core themes. First, they are grounded upon the principle of respect to human life and dignity. Next, in relation to the respect to the sanctity of life, they are advocates of environmentalism, carrying out projects that help save and nurture the world. Lastly, these two organizations are rooted on Humanistic Buddhist philosophy. These institutional principles serve as the framework with which SGI and Tzu Chi foundation carry themselves in their activities and advocacies.

Figure 2.2 below lays out the common themes in Soka Gakkai International's and Tzu Chi Foundation's organizational purposes. First, respect to human life and dignity was highlighted with SGI's world citizenship and concept of cultural diversity, and Tzu Chi Foundation's mission of charity and of culture. Second, both organizations are noted to advocate environmentalism. The ideal of symbiosis in SGI Charter and the protection of environment in Tzu Chi Foundation on the Tzu Chi Eight Footprints thrusts activities towards saving Mother Earth. Lastly, there is the promotion of ideals of humanistic Buddhism in grassroots exchange, dialogues, mission of culture and mission of education.



*Figure 2.2 Institutional Purpose*

The history of SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation reveals certain distinctness to the development of these two organizations. First and foremost, it is interesting to note that despite being religious organizations, they did not originate from exclusively religious concerns. Soka Gakkai and SGI were derived from a group advocating for educational reforms. Tzu Chi Foundation was born as a response to Cheng Yen's experience of witnessing the plight of impoverished people in her community and of being criticized by another religious group. Second, the historical development of both organizations rested upon the leadership of several key figures. Makiguchi, Toda and Ikeda were pivotal in the creation, reconstruction and expansion of the organization while Cheng Yen is the central figure of Tzu Chi Foundation's establishment up until its present day operations. Their institutional purpose that motivates the organizations also reveal similarities which can be categorized around three core themes. First, they are grounded upon the principle of respect to human life and dignity. In relation to the respect to the sanctity of life, they are also advocates of environmentalism, carrying out projects



that help save and nurture the world. Lastly, these two organizations are rooted on a Humanistic Buddhist philosophy as both organizations are focused on using Buddhist teachings to engage with society. The discussion on the history and institutional purpose of Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation is significant as it provides a foundation for a more in-depth assessment of these Buddhist transnational actors particularly on how they portray themselves in international affairs.

## **2) Appropriation into the Contemporary International System**

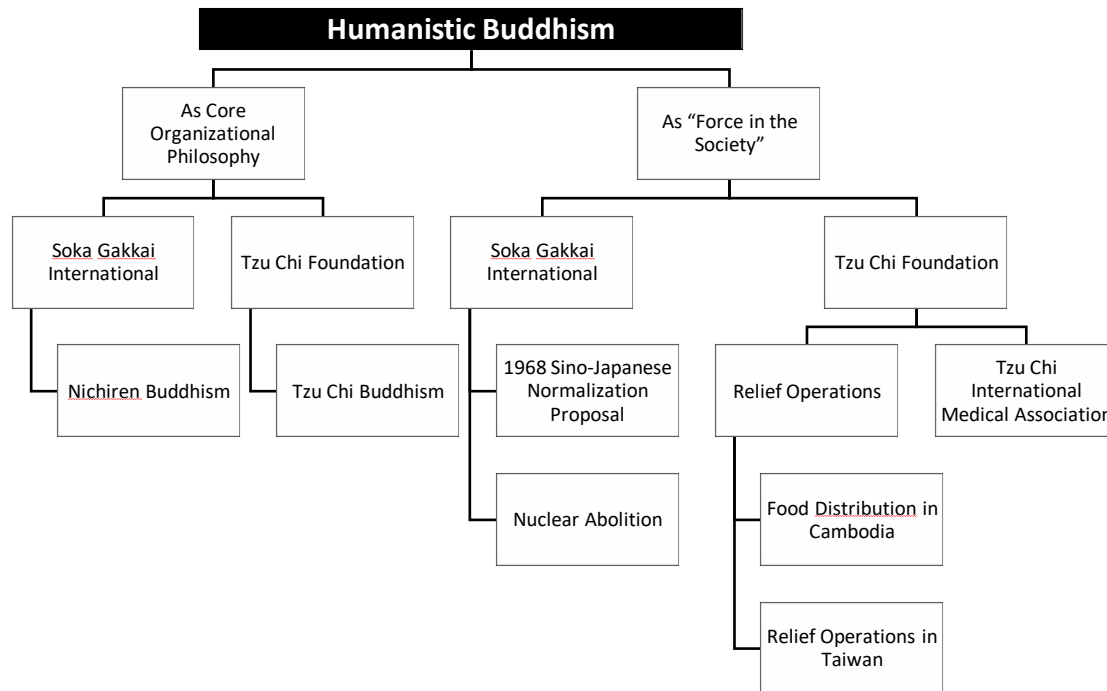
The principles of Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation determine the way they project themselves in the international system. They defy a strict interpretation of the Western concept of separation between the Church and the State because they uphold the characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism which is a socially engaged Buddhism. Their adherence to a Humanistic type of Buddhism leads to their perceived role as the world's panacea—providing prevention and cure to social issues that plagues the world today.

By examining the documents, beliefs and philosophy of the Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation, it was disclosed that both actors do not view themselves through the lens of Western concepts. Deeply rooted in Humanistic Buddhism, a type of Buddhism that encourages engagement with the secular realm, there is no inclination to the Westphalian myth of separation between secular and non-secular concerns.

Adhering to Humanistic Buddhism as their core organizational philosophy, Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation do not conform with the Western secularized concept of interstate system as they advocate the practical application of Buddhism to political and social

conducts. Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation do not explicitly state that they follow Humanistic Buddhism. However, delving into their principles, both organizations meet the description of the said philosophy. According to Venerable Master Hsin Yun (as cited in Wong, 2007, p. 255), Humanistic Buddhism is identified as the incorporation of Buddhism's spiritual practice into everyday living. It is practically concerned with individuals as well as social issues. SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation address these concerns by way of engaging towards self-cultivation and resolving social concerns.

Figure 3.1 on the next page presents how Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation exhibit Humanistic Buddhism as their core organizational philosophy. SGI follows and extends the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism to individuals while Tzu Chi Foundation allows people to experience Buddhism in their daily living. Both organizations believe that there is a Buddha in every person, capable and deserving concern. This also alludes to the vast potential of individuals with all the possibilities to be nurtured. The diagram displays activities by SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation that demonstrates both organizations as forces acting in the public sphere.



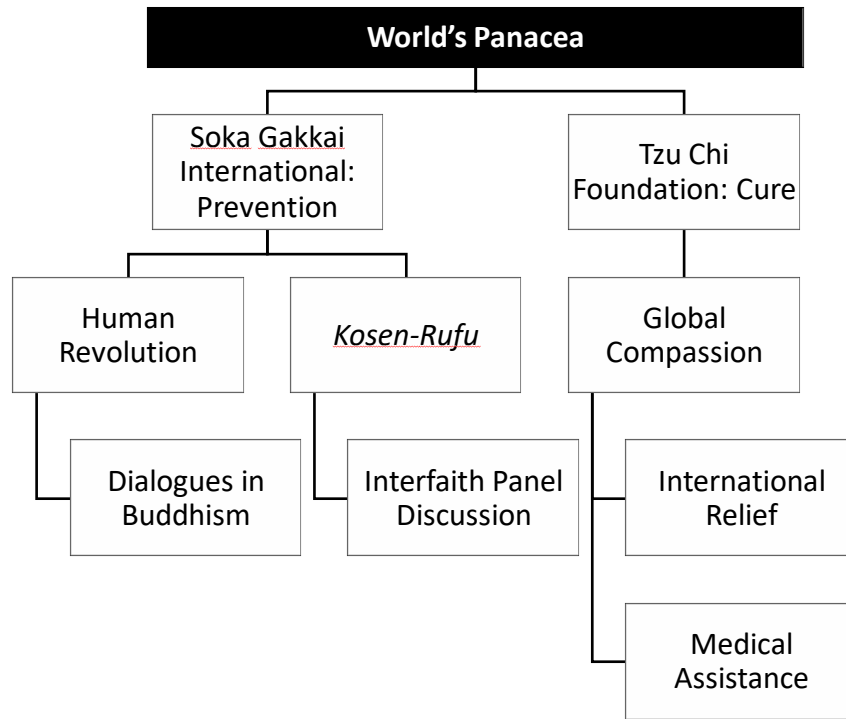
*Figure 3.1 Humanistic Buddhism*

The involvement of Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation in social and political matters makes an alternative brand in interstate relations, complementary to the conventional Westphalian system of nation-states. There is a parallelism between the conducts of the faith-based organizations and that of state actors. The Buddhist modernism projected by these organizations also encourages people to participate more in the issues surrounding their respective communities. This leaves a lesser gap between states, organizations, and individuals.

Both organizations also view a world that is chaotic. Therefore, they believe that it is their duty to give remedy to the issues besetting the world today with the SGI bent on prevention of war and nuclear destruction. Tzu Chi Foundation, on the other hand, provides the cure to the suffering of the people through relief, charity and medicine.

Actors in the international system uphold diverse perceptions of the world which becomes the motivation for the operation of their activities. For Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation, they perceive the world to be chaotic and in need of remedy, either as prevention to possible man-made catastrophes or as cure to existing crises and problems. In analyzing SGI's concepts of Human Revolution and *kosen-rufu*, it is observed that the organization intends to provide for preclusions for a possible catastrophic event like a nuclear war. Whereas in the case of Tzu Chi Foundation, their principle of global compassion serves as solution to the present issues that plague the world today.

The diagram (Figure 3.2) illustrates how Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation are considered as "World's Panacea" or providers of universal remedy to the chaotic world of today. SGI's Human Revolution concept suggests that a better, peaceful world can be attained from inner transformation. The organization conducts dialogues in Buddhism which is believed to be a mechanism of an individual's change from his lesser self or the ego-centric self towards the altruistic greater self. *Kosen-Rufu*, on the other hand, is referred to as "world peace from individual happiness," the ultimate goal of SGI. Nuclear abolition campaigns such as interfaith panel discussions denote that the organization's various engagements contribute to the preclusion of emerging damage that are possibly borne of overlooked political and social issues. Alternatively, Tzu Chi Foundation provides for solution to the already-present crises in the world. With their global compassion principle, the organization holds activities such as relief operations and medical assistance to alleviate individuals from their sufferings.



*Figure 3.2 World's Panacea*

Soka Gakkai International's concepts of Human Revolution and *Kosen-Rufu*, and Tzu Chi Foundation's global compassion are the driving forces to the efforts of the organizations in actualizing their goals and missions. Congruence can be noted between the beliefs of two organizations as they advocate the idea that the foundation of world peace is through individual formation.

SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation both ascribe to Buddhist schools that correspond to the characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism. Both organizations emphasize the need to translate their Buddhist beliefs into their daily lives and to realize their principles by engaging even into the secular realm something that is contrary to the Western concept of limiting religion only in the private sphere. Therefore, as socially engaged religious organizations, SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation will have their own way of viewing the world and their place in it. Their perception of the world and their role in it suggests these two organizations believe that their respective

missions as answers to the problems the world is facing today albeit in different ways. The philosophy and principles exemplified by SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation becomes a basis for the activities they organize. These activities give rise to the promotion of a World Society.

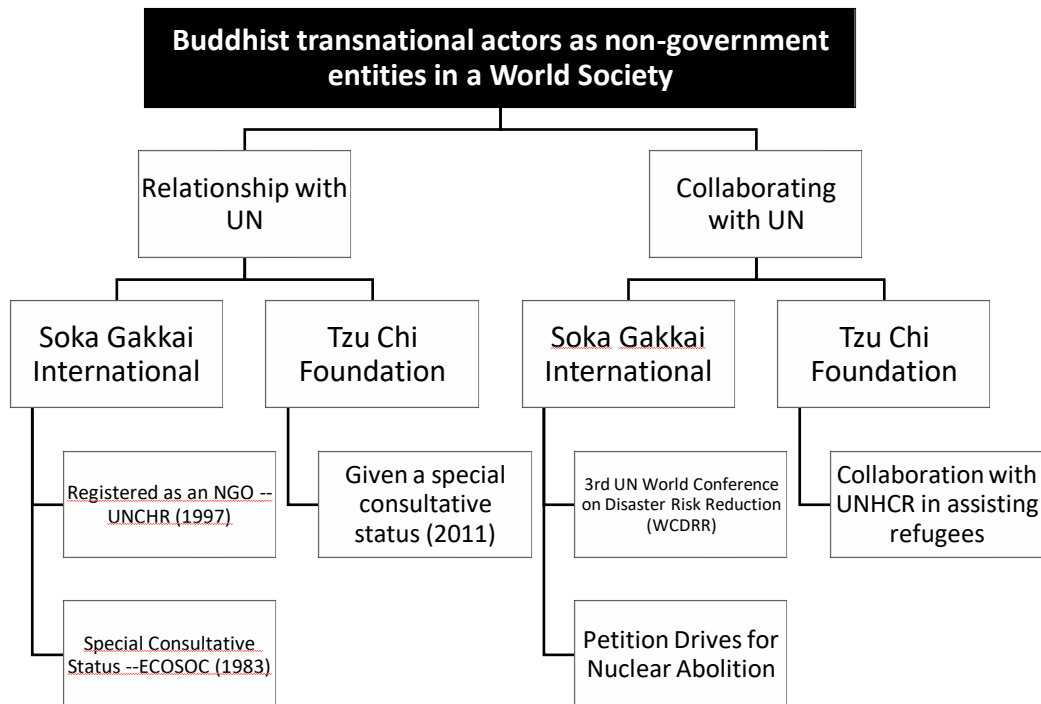
### **3) The Promotion of World Society by Buddhist Transnational Actors**

The existence of these transnational actors give rise to the existence of a World Society as conceptualized in the English School tradition. In a World Society setup, these actors function as non-state organizations that promote a shared identity that transcends the state. They propagate a shared identity no longer attached to the state, connecting each individual through the establishment of educational institutions, through the media and through grassroots level and exchange between individuals. Lastly, they focus on humanitarian responsibilities in their advocacies, expanding beyond the national responsibilities by promoting the welfare of human beings, which according to the English School Theory is a characteristic that is indicative of the existence of a World Society.

Buzan (as cited by Navari, 2015) states that, World Society is made up of individuals, non-state organizations and the global population altogether (p. 19). Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation can be classified as non-state organizations seeking to influence and create a change by participating in international relations primarily through cooperating with the United Nations.

Figure 4.1 on the following page presents Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation as non-state organizations establishing a relationship with the UN. Through

cooperating with the UN and its subsidiary bodies, SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation carry out its advocacies into the global realm especially those that need the combined effort of the people.



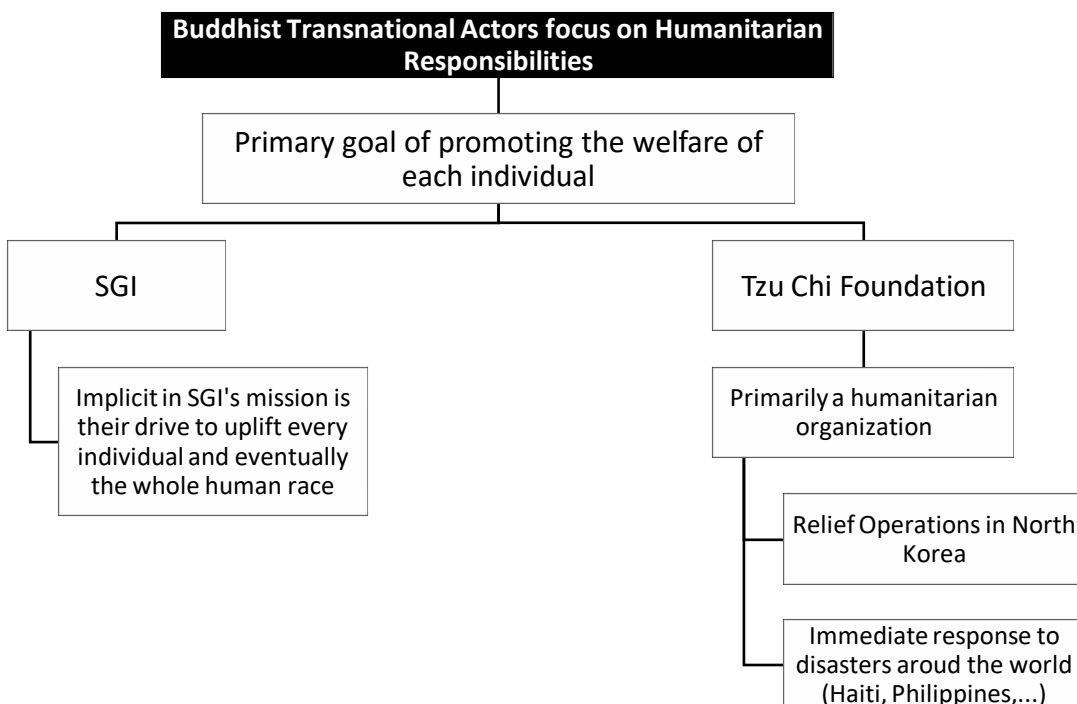
*Figure 4.1 As Non-Government Entities*

In the World Society set up, SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation are considered non-state organizations which influence the international system by collaborating with the United Nations. They recognize the significance of the UN especially with regard to the promotion of their respective missions. Working together with the UN and its sub-organs, non-state organizations like SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation gain access to the global population thus making it easier to propagate their identity throughout the world.

The second quality that identifies a World Society is that there is a shift from national and international responsibilities to humanitarian responsibilities (Buzan, 2014, p. 14). The aim of

these Buddhist transnational organizations is to promote the welfare of each individual in creating a better world beyond the confines of state security. Tzu Chi Foundation identifies itself primarily as an international humanitarian organization. The essence of its mission is rooted in humanitarian concerns, extending assistance regardless of nationality, race, culture, religious affiliation or political ideology. Although the SGI does not explicitly consider themselves as a humanitarian organization, their activities and advocacies show a great concern for the welfare of each human being. Their ideals and philosophy give emphasis on their responsibility to uplift the human race and ultimately, seek the happiness of every person.

Figure 4.2 is a thematic diagram that shows how SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation embodies the characteristic of actors in World Society where there is the focus on humanitarian responsibilities instead of state responsibilities.



*Figure 4.2 Focus on Humanitarian Activities*



It is clear from the data that these Buddhist organizations have the welfare of the human race at the heart of their mission. Their humanistic Buddhist philosophy manifests in the advocacies and activities they pursue. They are also bound to their commitment to humanitarian causes, giving much focus on the importance of each and every human life.

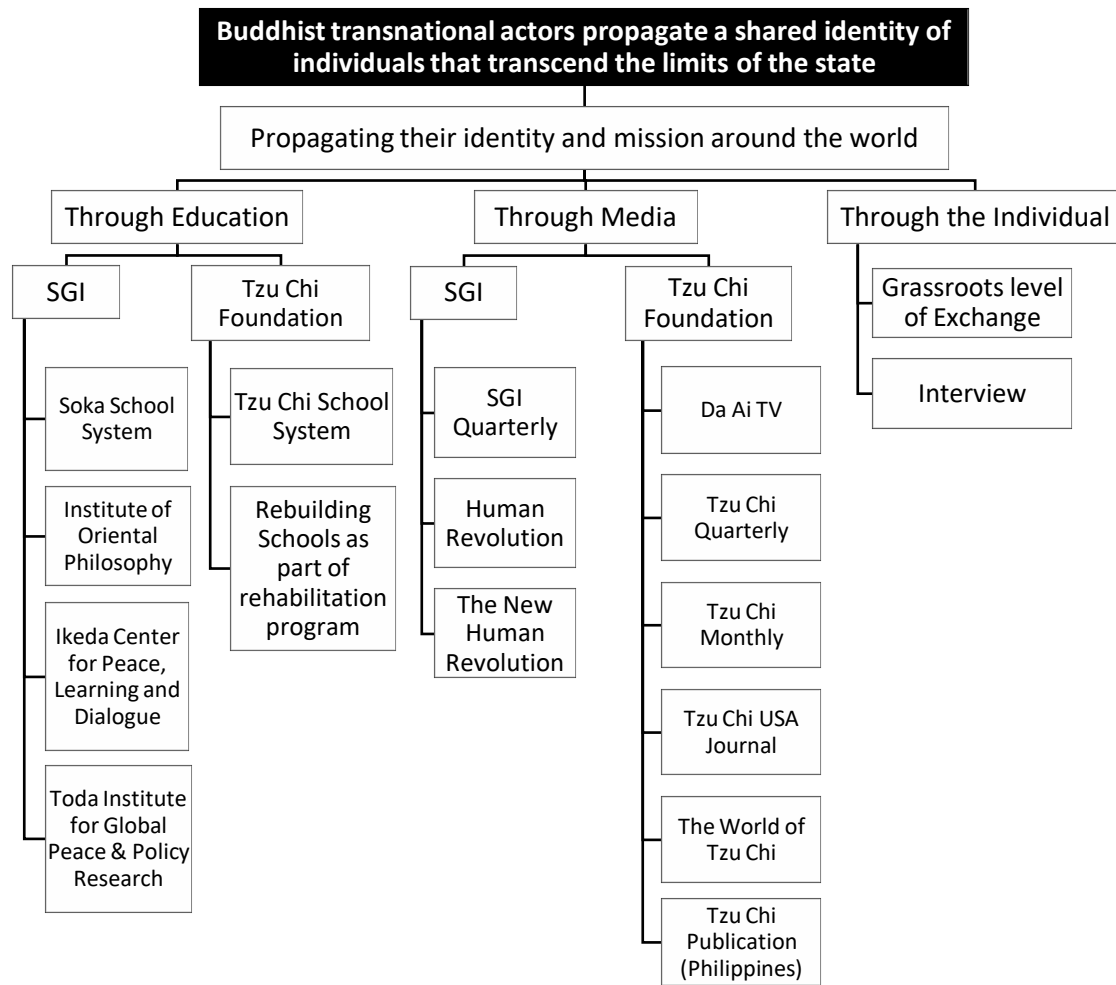
World Society is distinguished by the shared identity of individuals that in this case is no longer derived from the state but rather transcends it (Navari, 2015, p.19). Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation, as non-state organizations rooted in Humanistic Buddhist philosophy, go beyond the limits of the state through the promotion of their advocacies and activities. These two organizations are able to carry out their respective missions to different places regardless of culture, religion, race or political status. Each member who belongs to these organizations associates themselves with the identity introduced by their group, an identity that transcends the nation-state.

Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation are both rooted in a type of Buddhism that focuses on the world and how they can help through their faith. Josei Toda, Soka Gakkai's second president believed in what he called "Global Citizenship" expressing the idea at a time when the world was virtually divided into two political poles. Toda's vision for global citizenship states that there is an expansion of an individual's identity, from his local to national to one that includes the entire world (Josei Toda Website Committee, n.d.). Master Cheng Yen also believes that their mission of showing compassion and relieving suffering is universal and must be brought to all the people in the world. Both identities require that it be brought from

their own community to the global level of awareness thus these Buddhist transnational organizations engage in activities that propagate their mission and identity to the world.

What is unique to the English School's World Society is that the individual is considered as the most important actor and it is through these individuals that the identity is propagated beyond the state and into the global realm. Grassroots level engagement is an integral part to Soka Gakkai International's faith and practice. The personal experiences of their members are valuable because it is through these personal experiences that their beliefs are manifested and exemplified. The sharing of experiences and testimonies from members is an important practice propagated in the community level. This starts from local meetings and to the global realm through the practice of reporting their activities to Soka Gakkai Japan and are documented in their publications. The propagation of the shared identity from the individual to the global level is sustained through the practices of the local SGI communities. As one of the respondents elucidated the process of *Kosen-Rufu* enables the existence of an identity that is no longer tied to their national identities because in the practice of their faith, the concern is no longer on the state level but rather for humanity as a whole.

Figure 4.3 illustrates how Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation as non-state organizations propagate their identity to the global population. Through establishing educational institutions, utilizing digital and print media and engaging in grassroots level exchange, this shared identity is no longer tied to state identities but rather transcending it.



*Figure 4.3 Shared Identities of Individuals*

In the promotion of World Society as envisioned by the English School Theory, Buddhist Transnational Actors act as non-state organizations whose primary concern is of a humanitarian character. Since these organizations have members around the world, their identities are sustained through education, through the media and the individual level of exchange. Members of SGI and Tzu Chi ascribe to ideas that no longer correspond to the national level but rather go beyond into a more universal character. This is precisely because Buddhist transnational actors like SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation satisfy the characteristics of a World Society; it could be argued that their existence signals the existence of a World Society operating in our world today.

## **Conclusion**

The data suggests that the existence of Buddhist transnational actors like the Soka Gakkai International and Tzu Chi Foundation corresponds to the characteristics of a World Society as set forth by the English School Tradition. These faith-based transnational organizations with a large membership around the world are able to influence and play a role in the global affairs but also operate beyond the state-level. It is impossible to ignore the role they play in the world system as they actively engage in social, and to some extent, political issues at hand. They have become global movements, operating from the individual to the global realm. The idea that religion should be separated from public sphere does not appear to be in their consciousness because it is their very belief that their faith must be expanded into society itself. Their vision of the world is one that is a network of interconnected individuals sharing the same hope for a peaceful and happy world, one that is free from suffering and pain. Most significantly, this vision is acted upon through their countless advocacies and activities. The English School supports the essence of Buddhist transnational actors like SGI and Tzu Chi Foundation because as Buzan stated, “The English School is broadly meliorist, thinking that an imperfect world can be made better by human effort, rather than idealist or utopian” (2014, p 30). Indeed, it is no longer tenable for IR to ignore Buddhist transnational actors and their impact to the contemporary world for they are actively taking part in it through the promotion of their worldview.